



Old South Leaflets.

No. 216.

## Poems of Walt Whitman.

SELECTIONS FOR  
STIRRING TIMES.

### INTRODUCTION.

“My Book and I—what a period we have presumed to span! those thirty years from 1850 to '80—and America in them! Proud, proud indeed may we be, if we have cull'd enough of that period in its own spirit to worthily waft a few live breaths of it to the future!”

Thus wrote Walt Whitman, in his *Backward Glance o'er Travel'd Roads*. Well might he be proud! Contemptuous of old-world themes and verse-forms, yet a born poet and singer; a man of the people, yet devoid of class consciousness and prejudices; American to the core, yet a lover of all nations and peoples; Walt Whitman succeeded better than any of his contemporaries in transmitting the spirit of those stirring times to these stirring times.

His inspiration, and his theme, was “the broadest average of humanity and its identities in the now ripening Nineteenth Century, and especially in each of their countless examples and practical occupations in the United States today.” His aim, “How best can I express my own distinctive era

2d set

Monograph

and surroundings, America, Democracy?" "Although I had made a start before," he writes (the first book or installment of *Leaves of Grass* appeared in 1855), "only from the occurrence of the Secession War, and what it show'd me as by flashes of lightning, with the emotional depths it sounded and arous'd . . . only from the strong flare and provocation of that war's sights and scenes the final reasons-for-being of an autochthonic and passionate song definitely came forth."

*Europe, the 72d and 73d Years of These States* (1848), the first long poem in this selection, was written during the period of reaction after 1848. The great revolutionary movement, that had spread throughout France, Germany, Italy, Austria and Poland, had just been suppressed ruthlessly by the kings and princes; William II's great-uncle playing a notorious part. Walt Whitman's optimism at that dark hour is now justified; and his prophecy, "They live in other young men O kings!" is being fulfilled; for thousands of descendants of the German republicans who fled to America in 1848-49 are now fighting in the Army of Democracy.

The Civil War poems, which were first published in *Drum-Taps* in 1865, were the result of Walt's own experience on the battlefields, in the military hospitals, and at Washington, as an army nurse. (See also Leaflet No. 217.)

*O Star of France* records another dark hour in the history of our sister republic—the "terrible year" of 1870-71, when, tricked into war by Bismarck, betrayed by Bazaine, torn by internal convulsions, and overrun by German hordes, France had to yield up Alsace and Lorraine in order to redeem the rest of her territory. "Again thy star



O France, fair lustrous star, . . . shall beam immortal"—Walt's buoyant prophecy at the end of this poem, has, as we all know, been more than fulfilled.

In the *Song for All Seas, All Ships*, and the beautiful *Thick-Sprinkled Bunting*, Walt Whitman seems to be peering into the future, when our flag, triumphant in his time over American disunion, shall in our time conquer world disunion, and lead the way to a League of Nations that alone can save mankind from the recurring scourge of war. We are now fighting, that this third prophecy of Walt Whitman may be fulfilled.

Horace Traubel, the comrade, biographer and literary executor of Walt Whitman, has kindly given us permission to print these selections from the works of the "Good Gray Poet."

### SHUT NOT YOUR DOORS.

SHUT not your doors to me proud libraries,  
 For that which was lacking on all your well-fill'd shelves,  
     yet needed most, I bring,  
 Forth from the war emerging, a book I have made,  
 The words of my book nothing, the drift of it every thing,  
 A book separate, not link'd with the rest nor felt by the  
     intellect,  
 But you ye untold latencies will thrill to every page.

### AFTER THE SEA-SHIP.

AFTER the sea-ship, after the whistling winds,  
 After the white-gray sails taut to their spars and ropes,  
 Below, a myriad myriad waves hastening, lifting up their  
     necks,  
 Tending in ceaseless flow toward the track of the ship,



Waves of the ocean bubbling and gurgling, blithely prying,  
 Waves, undulating waves, liquid, uneven, emulous waves,  
 Toward that whirling current, laughing and buoyant, with  
     curves,  
 Where the great vessel sailing and tacking displaced the  
     surface,  
 Larger and smaller waves in the spread of the ocean yearn-  
     fully flowing,  
 The wake of the sea-ship after she passes, flashing and frolic-  
     some under the sun,  
 A motley procession with many a fleck of foam and many  
     fragments,  
 Following the stately and rapid ship, in the wake following.

## EUROPE.

### *The 72d and 73d Years of These States.*

SUDDENLY out of its stale and drowsy lair, the lair of slaves,  
 Like lightning it le'pt forth half startled at itself,  
 Its feet upon the ashes and the rags, its hands tight to the  
     throats of kings.

O hope and faith!  
 O aching close of exiled patriots' lives!  
 O many a sicken'd heart!  
 Turn back unto this day and make yourselves afresh.

And you, paid to defile the People — you liars, mark !  
 Not for numberless agonies, murders, lusts,  
 For court thieving in its manifold mean forms, worming  
     from his simplicity the poor man's wages,  
 For many a promise sworn by royal lips and broken and  
     laugh'd at in the breaking,  
 Then in their power not for all these did the blows strike  
     revenge, or the heads of the nobles fall;  
 The People scorn'd the ferocity of kings.

But the sweetness of mercy brew'd bitter destruction, and  
     the frighten'd monarchs come back,

Each comes in state with his train, hangman, priest, tax-gatherer,  
 Soldier, lawyer, lord, jailer, and sycophant.

Yet behind all lowering stealing, lo, a shape,  
 Vague as the night, draped interminably, head, front and  
 form, in scarlet folds,  
 Whose face and eyes none may see,  
 Out of its robes only this, the red robes lifted by the arm,  
 One finger crook'd pointed high over the top, like the head  
 of a snake appears.

Meanwhile corpses lie in new-made graves, bloody corpses  
 of young men,  
 The rope of the gibbet hangs heavily, the bullets of princes  
 are flying, the creatures of power laugh aloud,  
 And all these things bear fruits, and they are good.

Those corpses of young men,  
 Those martyrs that hang from the gibbets, those hearts  
 pierc'd by the gray lead,  
 Cold and motionless as they seem live elsewhere with un-  
 slaughter'd vitality.

They live in other young men O kings!  
 They live in brothers again ready to defy you,  
 They were purified by death, they were taught and exalted.

Not a grave of the murder'd for freedom but grows seed for  
 freedom, in its turn to bear seed,  
 Which the winds carry afar and re-sow, and the rains and  
 the snows nourish.

Not a disembodied spirit can the weapons of tyrants let  
 loose,  
 But it stalks invisibly over the earth, whispering, counseling,  
 cautioning.

Liberty, let others despair of you—I never despair of you.

Is the house shut? is the master away?  
 Nevertheless, be ready, be not weary of watching,  
 He will soon return, his messengers come anon.

## LONG, TOO LONG AMERICA.

LONG, too long, America.  
 Traveling roads all even and peaceful you learn'd from  
     joys and prosperity only,  
 But now, ah now, to learn from crises of anguish, advancing,  
     grappling with direst fate and recoiling not,  
 And now to conceive and show to the world what your chil-  
     dren en-masse really are,  
 (For who except myself has yet conceiv'd what your chil-  
     dren en-masse really are?)

## DELICATE CLUSTER.

DELICATE cluster! flag of teeming life!  
 Covering all my lands—all my seashores lining!  
 Flag of death! (how I watch'd you through the smoke of  
     battle pressing!  
 How I heard you flap and rustle, cloth defiant!)  
 Flag cerulean — sunny flag, with the orbs of night dappled!  
 Ah my silvery beauty — ah my woolly white and crimson!  
 Ah to sing the songs of you, my matron mighty!  
 My sacred one, my mother.

## EIGHTEEN SIXTY-ONE.

ARM'D year — year of the struggle,  
 No dainty rhymes or sentimental love verses for you terrible  
     year,  
 Not you as some pale poetling seated at a desk lisping  
     cadenzas piano, /  
 But as a strong man erect, clothed in blue clothes, advancing,  
     carrying a rifle on your shoulder,  
 With well-gristled body and sunburnt face and hands, with  
     a knife in the belt at your side,  
 As I heard you shouting loud, your sonorous voice ringing  
     across the continent,  
 Your masculine voice O year, as rising amid the great cities,

Amid the men of Manhattan I saw you as one of the work-  
 men, the dwellers in Manhattan,  
 Or with large steps crossing the prairies out of Illinois and  
 Indiana,  
 Rapidly crossing the West with springy gait and descending  
 the Alleghanies,  
 Or down from the great lakes or in Pennsylvania, or on deck  
 along the Ohio river,  
 Or southward along the Tennessee or Cumberland rivers,  
 or at Chattanooga on the mountain top,  
 Saw I your gait and saw I your sinewy limbs clothed in  
 blue, bearing weapons, robust year,  
 Heard your determin'd voice launch'd forth again and again,  
 Year that suddenly sang by the mouths of the round-lipp'd  
 cannon,  
 I repeat you, hurrying, crashing, sad, distracted year.

### BEAT ! BEAT ! DRUMS !

BEAT! beat! drums! — blow! bugles! blow!  
 Through the windows — through doors — burst like a  
 ruthless force,  
 Into the solemn church, and scatter the congregation,  
 Into the school where the scholar is studying;  
 Leave not the bridegroom quiet—no happiness must he  
 have now with his bride,  
 Nor the peaceful farmer any peace, ploughing his field or  
 gathering his grain,  
 So fierce you whirr and pound you drums—so shrill you  
 bugles blow.

Beat! beat! drums! — blow! bugles! blow!  
 Over the traffic of cities — over the rumble of wheels in the  
 streets;  
 Are beds prepared for sleepers at night in the houses? no  
 sleepers must sleep in those beds,  
 No bargainers' bargains by day — no brokers or specu-  
 lators — would they continue?  
 Would the talkers be talking? would the singer attempt to  
 sing?



Would the lawyer rise in the court to state his case before  
the judge?  
Then rattle quicker, heavier drums — you bugles wilder  
blow.

Beat! beat! drums! — blow! bugles! blow!  
Make no parley — stop for no expostulation,  
Mind not the timid — mind not the weeper or prayer,  
Mind not the old man beseeching the young man,  
Let not the child's voice be heard, nor the mother's  
entreaties,  
Make even the trestles to shake the dead where they lie  
awaiting the hearses,  
So strong you thump O terrible drums — so loud you bugles  
blow.

### CITY OF SHIPS.

CITY of ships!  
(O the black ships ! O the fierce ships !  
O the beautiful sharp-bow'd steam-ships and sail-ships !)  
City of the world ! (for all races are here,  
All the lands of the earth make contributions here;)  
City of the sea! city of hurried and glittering tides!  
City whose gleeful tides continually rush or recede, whirling  
in and out with eddies and foam !  
City of wharves and stores — city of tall façades of marble  
and iron !  
Proud and passionate city — mettlesome, mad, extravagant  
city !  
Spring up O city — not for peace alone, but be indeed your-  
self, warlike !  
Fear not — submit to no models but your own O city !  
Behold me — incarnate me as I have incarnated you !  
I have rejected nothing you offer'd me — whom you adopted  
I have adopted,  
Good or bad I never question you — I love all — I do not  
condemn any thing,  
I chant and celebrate all that is yours — yet peace no more,  
In peace I chanted peace, but now the drum of war is mine,  
War, red war is my song through your streets, O city !



## CAVALRY CROSSING A FORD.

A LINE in long array where they wind betwixt green islands,  
 They take a serpentine course, their arms flash in the sun —  
     hark to the musical clank,  
 Behold the silvery river, in it the splashing horses loitering  
     stop to drink,  
 Behold the brown-faced men, each group, each person a  
     picture, the negligent rest on the saddles,  
 Some emerge on the opposite bank, others are just entering  
     the ford — while,  
 Scarlet and blue and snowy white,  
 The guidon flags flutter gayly in the wind.

## COME UP FROM THE FIELDS FATHER.

COME up from the fields father, here's a letter from our Pete,  
 And come to the front door mother, here's a letter from thy  
     dear son.

Lo, 'tis autumn,  
 Lo, where the trees, deeper green, yellower and redder,  
 Cool and sweeten Ohio's villages with leaves fluttering in  
     the moderate wind,  
 Where apples ripe in the orchards hang and grapes on the  
     trellis'd vines,  
 (Smell you the smell of the grapes on the vines?  
 Smell you the buckwheat where the bees were lately  
     buzzing?)  
 Above all, lo, the sky so calm, so transparent after the rain,  
     and with wondrous clouds,  
 Below too, all calm, all vital and beautiful, and the farm  
     prosperes well.

Down in the fields all prospers well,  
 But now from the fields come father, come at the daughter's  
     call,  
 And come to the entry mother, to the front door come right  
     away.

Fast as she can she hurries, something ominous, her steps  
trembling,  
She does not tarry to smooth her hair nor adjust her cap.

Open the envelope quickly,  
O this is not our son's writing, yet his name is sign'd,  
O a strange hand writes for our dear son, O stricken  
mother's soul!  
All swims before her eyes, flashes with black, she catches the  
main words only,  
Sentences broken, *gunshot wound in the breast, cavalry skir-*  
*mish, taken to hospital,*  
*At present low, but will soon be better.*

Ah now the single figure to me,  
Amid all teeming and wealthy Ohio with all its cities and  
farms,  
Sickly white in the face and dull in the head, very faint,  
By the jamb of a door leans.

*Grieve not so, dear mother,* (the just-grown daughter speaks  
through her sobs,  
The little sisters huddle around speechless and dismay'd,)  
*See, dearest mother, the letter says Pete will soon be better.*

Alas poor boy, he will never be better, (nor may-be needs  
to be better, that brave and simple soul,)  
While they stand at home at the door he is dead already,  
The only son is dead.

But the mother needs to be better,  
She with thin form presently drest in black,  
By day her meals untouch'd, then at night fitfully sleeping,  
often waking,  
In the midnight waking, weeping, longing with one deep  
longing,  
O that she might withdraw unnoticed, silent from life escape  
and withdraw.  
To follow, to seek, to be with her dear dead son.

## ETHIOPIA SALUTING THE COLORS.

Who are you dusky woman, so ancient hardly human,  
With your woolly-white and turban'd head, and bare bony  
feet?

Why rising by the roadside here, do you the colors greet?

('Tis while our army lines Carolina's sands and pines,  
Forth from thy hovel door thou Ethiopia com'st to me,  
As under doughty Sherman I march toward the sea.)

*Me master years a hundred since from my parents sunder'd,  
A little child, they caught me as the savage beast is caught,  
Then hither me across the sea the cruel slaver brought.*

No further does she say, but lingering all the day,  
Her high-borne turban'd head she wags, and rolls her dark-  
ling eye,  
And courtesies to the regiments, the guidons moving by.

What is it fateful woman, so blear, hardly human?  
Why wag your head with turban bound, yellow, red and  
green?  
Are the things so strange and marvelous you see or have  
seen?

## OVER THE CARNAGE ROSE PROPHETIC A VOICE.

OVER the carnage rose prophetic a voice,  
Be not dishearten'd, affection shall solve the problems of  
freedom yet,  
Those who love each other shall become invincible,  
They shall yet make Columbia victorious.

Sons of the Mother of All, you shall yet be victorious,  
You shall yet laugh to scorn the attacks of all the remainder  
of the earth.

No danger shall balk Columbia's lovers,  
If need be a thousand shall sternly immolate themselves for  
one.

One from Massachusetts shall be a Missourian's comrade,  
From Maine and from hot Carolina, and another an Oregon-  
ese, shall be friends triune,  
More precious to each other than all the riches of the earth.

To Michigan, Florida perfumes shall tenderly come,  
Not the perfume of flowers, but sweeter, and wafted beyond  
death.

It shall be customary in the houses and streets to see manly  
affection,  
The most dauntless and rude shall touch face to face lightly,  
The dependence of Liberty shall be lovers,  
The continuance of Equality shall be comrades.

These shall tie you and band you stronger than hoops of  
iron,  
I, ecstatic, O partners! O lands! with the love of lovers tie  
you.

(Were you looking to be held together by lawyers?  
Or by an agreement on a paper? or by arms?  
Nay, nor the world, nor any living thing, will so cohere.)

## O STAR OF FRANCE.

1870-71.

O STAR of France,  
The brightness of thy hope and strength and fame,  
Like some proud ship that led the fleet so long,  
Beseems to-day a wreck driven by the gale, a mastless hulk,  
And 'mid its teeming madden'd half-drown'd crowds,  
Nor helm nor helmsman.



Dim smitten star,  
 Orb not of France alone, pale symbol of my soul, its dearest  
     hopes,  
 The struggle and the daring, rage divine for liberty,  
 Of aspirations toward the far ideal, enthusiast's dreams of  
     brotherhood,  
 Of terror to the tyrant and the priest.  
 Star crucified — by traitors sold,  
 Star panting o'er a land of death, heroic land,  
 Strange, passionate, mocking, frivolous land.

Miserable! yet for thy errors, vanities, sins, I will not now  
     rebuke thee,  
 Thy unexampled woes and pangs have quell'd them all,  
 And left thee sacred.

In that amid thy many faults thou ever aimedst highly,  
 In that thou wouldst not really sell thyself however great the  
     price,  
 In that thou surely wakedst weeping from thy drugg'd  
     sleep,  
 In that alone among thy sisters thou, giantess, didst rend the  
     ones that shamed thee,  
 In that thou couldst not, wouldst not, wear the usual chains,  
 This cross, thy livid face, thy pierced hands and feet,  
 The spear thrust in thy side.

O star! O ship of France, beat back and baffled long!  
 Bear up O smitten orb! O ship continue on!

Sure as the ship of all, the Earth itself,  
 Product of deathly fire and turbulent chaos,  
 Forth from its spasms of fury and its poisons,  
 Issuing at last in perfect power and beauty,  
 Onward beneath the sun following its course,  
 So thee O ship of France!

Finish'd the days, the clouds dispel'd,  
 The travail o'er, the long-sought extrication,  
 When lo! reborn, high o'er the European world,

(In gladness answering thence, as face afar to face, reflect-  
     ing ours Columbia,)  
 Again thy star O France, fair lustrous star,  
 In heavenly peace, clearer, more bright than ever,  
 Shall beam immortal.

## SONG FOR ALL SEAS, ALL SHIPS.

TO-DAY a rude brief recitative,  
 Of ships sailing the seas, each with its special flag or ship-  
     signal,  
 Of unnamed heroes in the ships — of waves spreading and  
     spreading far as the eye can reach,  
 Of dashing spray, and the winds piping and blowing,  
 And out of these a chant for the sailors of all nations,  
 Fitful, like a surge.

Of sea-captains young or old, and the mates, and of all  
     intrepid sailors,  
 Of the few, very choice, taciturn, whom fate can never sur-  
     prise nor death dismay,  
 Pick'd sparingly without noise by thee old ocean, chosen  
     by thee,  
 Thou sea that pickest and cullest the race in time, and unitest  
     nations,  
 Suckled by thee, old husky nurse, embodying thee,  
 Indomitable, untamed as thee.

(Ever the heroes on water or on land, by ones or twos  
     appearing,  
 Ever the stock preserv'd and never lost, though rare, enough  
     for seed preserv'd.)

## 2

Flaunt out O sea your separate flags of nations!  
 Flaunt out visible as ever the various ship-signals!  
 But do you reserve especially for yourself and for the soul  
     of man one flag above all the rest,

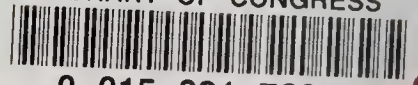
A spiritual woven signal for all nations, emblem of man  
 late above death,  
 Token of all brave captains and all intrepid sailors and  
 mates,  
 And all that went down doing their duty,  
 Reminiscent of them, twined from all intrepid captains  
 young or old,  
 A pennant universal, subtly waving all time, o'er all brave  
 sailors,  
 All seas, all ships.

### THICK-SPRINKLED BUNTING.

THICK-SPRINKLED bunting! flag of stars!  
 Long yet your road, fateful flag — long yet your road, and  
 lined with bloody death,  
 For the prize I see at issue at last is the world,  
 All its ships and shores I see interwoven with your threads  
 greedy banner;  
 Dream'd again the flag of kings, highest borne, to flaunt  
 unrival'd?  
 O hasten flag of man — O with sure and steady step, pass-  
 ing highest flag of kings,  
 Walk supreme to the heavens mighty symbol — run up  
 above them all,  
 Flag of stars! thick-sprinkled bunting!

Walt Whitman's poems appeared at intervals between 1855 and his death in 1892. They are published in one volume, in several editions, under the title *Leaves of Grass*, which was also the name of his first book.

There are numerous biographies and critical studies of Walt Whitman and his work by American, English, French and other writers. *With Walt Whitman at Camden*, by his comrade Horace Traubel, to be complete in eight volumes, is a mas-



terly and exhaustive record of the doings and sayings of the Poet of Democracy in his later years.

Old South Leaflet No. 217 contains a selection of Walt's prose writings on the Civil War.

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